

MANIFEST

v23



Resistance to Vision: Searching, Sifting, Finding, Seeing



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MANIFEST

CREATIVE RESEARCH GALLERY
AND DRAWING CENTER

volume 23

Resistance to Vision: Searching, Sifting, Finding, Seeing

Curated by Dana Saulnier

MANIFEST is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization

MANIFEST VOLUME TWENTY-THREE

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Manifest Creative Research Gallery and Drawing Center

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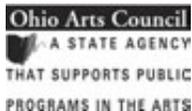
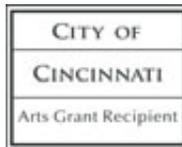
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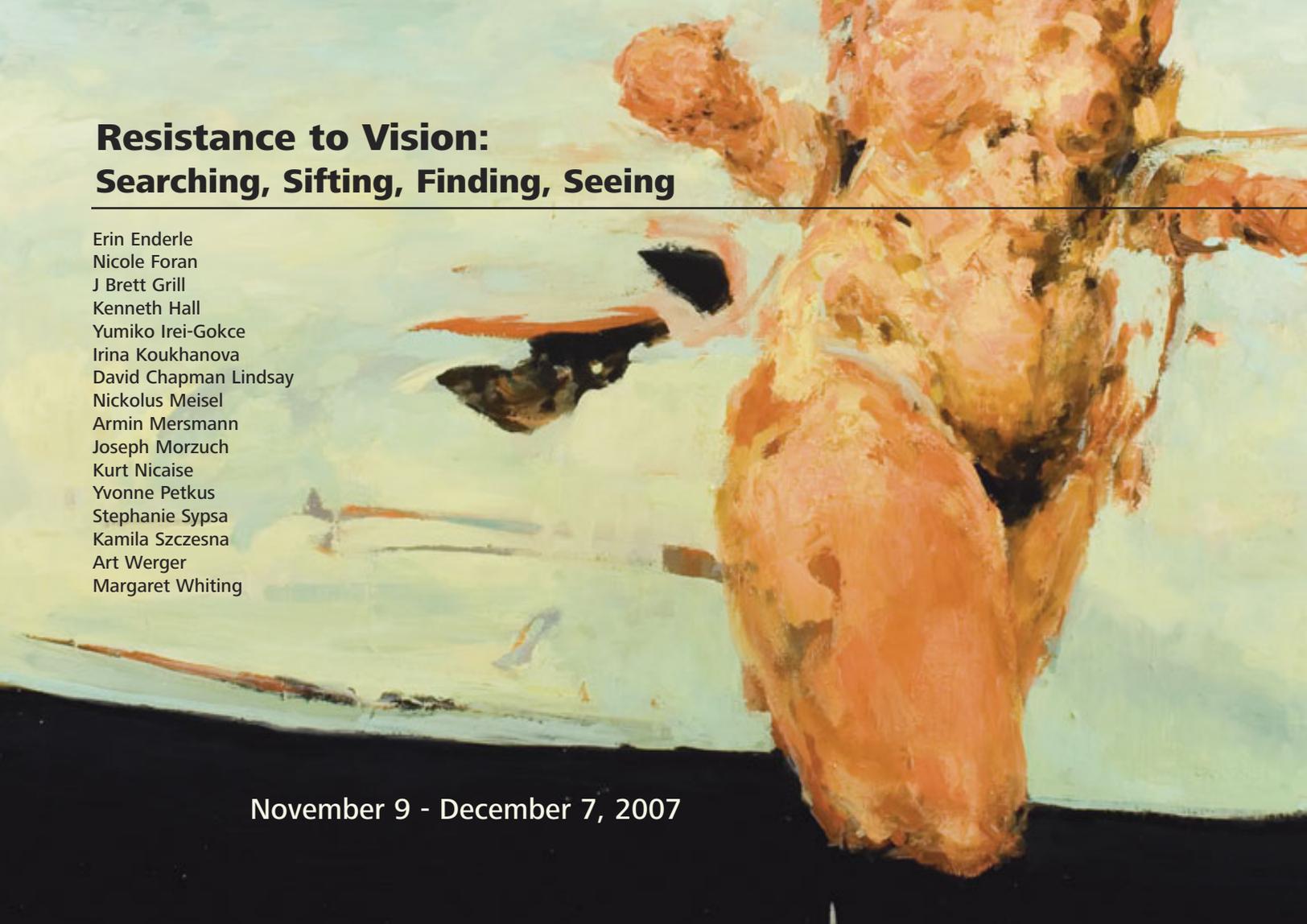
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Joseph Morzuch
Kurt Nicaise
Yvonne Petkus
Stephanie Sypsa
Kamila Szczesna
Art Werger
Margaret Whiting

November 9 - December 7, 2007



Curated by Dana Saulnier

Resistance to Vision as an organizing principle for this exhibition arises out of a number of ideas and observations-- all having to do with thinking about creative practices. A lot of this comes directly out of doing creative work, as well as helping others find their own artistic voice. The same thinking also lends itself to an argument that distinguishes the visual in the face of contemporary theories that center on language. For several generations much theory has taken the operation of language as the fundamental framework for understanding cultural forms. The "linguistic turn" in theory is the prevalent mode of post-modernism. This project compiles a set of ideas meant to position "resistance" and "blindness" as productive orientations to the visual.

These ideas arise directly from my creative life in the studio. When I am working I am almost always in a situation where I am not seeing what I want to see. What I hope to see is an artwork capable of fulfilling its being, that is, seeing an artwork that is engaging

formally, emotionally and intellectually. The truth is I spend ninety percent or more of my creative time not seeing this. Most days I am happy to catch a glimpse indicating such a thing could happen. Creative persons, poets, writers, visual artists, have all described this situation again and again. They continually give evidence of practices where time is regulated by rhythms of “blindness” coupled to vision. They place themselves into practices that are as much about resistance as realization.

Secondly, the idea of Resistance to Vision arises from my reading life, and is a response to theory dominated art discourses that are so often distant from the practices of creative persons. Such reading is of course the multi headed monster we so frequently confront whenever we pick up an exhibition catalog or pay attention to the cadre of voices who set out to write around art. An important example is the legacy of semiotics, where an image is understood as a floating sign, disconnected from any intention of a creator, and seen most effectively as an operant in social power structures. This method has had a long lasting and pervasive influence on those who think about visual art. Multiple collectives of academics are vested in this paradigm. At present it is an institutional given, prominent in how artists are educated, in how art is exhibited, in how art is written about, and in how it is valued.

A theory is a thinking position. It is a filter that elevates some matters and deflects or ignores others. The operation of language as a “system of signs” is the object of semiotics. Everyday actual speech is deflected. The “system of language” negotiates codes of already understood signifiers that are fenced off from the specific moment of presentation. For artistic practice this translates as a situation where: 1. Both verbal and visual art forms are read as language. 2. Actual speech equates with the specific, singular, qualities of the art object, its marks, textures, dimensions, etc.

3. The actual, specific, singular qualities of objects are inconsequential to the systematic, ideological, meanings of discourse. This is the “methodological baggage” of semiotic theory and we see its influence frequently.

Stated dramatically, semiotics cannot ‘see’ the specifics of artworks, marks in a drawing for example, Such specifics are sub-semiotic. These phenomena are visual noise, inconsequential to the operation of the system of language. In semiotics one is always embedded in representation understood as a system of quotations because that is where one is available to theory. Is this a productive environment for creative work?

This exhibition begins from thinking otherwise. Artists must think from the specifics of work, whether those specifics are words, marks, or digital code. I see the central assumptions of a reduced and institutionalized semiotics as pathetically inadequate to the modes of relation present in creative practices: to what artists think and do. This semiotics requires that the artist is always and only embedded with a system of representations. Is this an accurate statement? Let us say for now that it is accurate, or somehow partially so. Does this then mean such representations are interchangeable modular units of meaning, or could some representations be fragmentary, allusive, decayed, or nascent phenomena, resistant to efficient normative meanings? This is a telling question because it opens up the grounding condition of a semiotic conception quite differently. The modular conception positions artists as always and only embedded within a system of representations that can be sampled, collaged, and re-read. The resistance conception places artists into productive practice differently. It points to deeper tensions-- including that between the formation of art and an extended plane of co-present beings fundamentally unlike a discursive field of signifiers.

So again I find myself wondering about the practice of making art, with its consistent cycles of 'blindness', where one is always moving between seeing and not seeing, between figure and ground, between revealing and concealing. How do we understand this? How does this make sense for a theoretical perspective that has artists always and only engaging the already known and the already said?

I suppose artists could all be stupid, unthinking, situated automatons; passive conduits of historical eras understood exclusively as battlegrounds of ideological interests. I suppose they can be thought of as persons who manipulate surface effects with no claim to any further mode of relation to their production. I am stating this baldly, but I believe it is an accurate characterization of how artistic thinking is currently understood. I could become indignant at this point, but a more precise response is an overwhelming, tired, boredom that arises in me at such a reductive conception.

There are much more compelling ways of thinking about art making. Perhaps artists think! Perhaps they are valuable because they think differently. What if the practice of creativity was better understood as "growth"? Where matter and mind mutually move, proliferate, and transform, producing embodied mind simultaneously with expressive matter. What if the creative process was more compellingly conceived as a feed back loop characterized by resistance? It becomes possible to conceive of creativity as a situation where the resistances of a medium regulate thinking to rhythms of growth and decay, where dense and multiple frames of reference and sensation are diffused, re-ordered and nurtured: growing something unexpected and singular. As art becomes it carries forward its specificity across duration as a flesh between thinking and being. A form both singular and multiple, specific and virtual.

The difficulty in this discussion is its vast and subtle dimensions. To discuss Resistance to Vision in relation to creativity is akin to remarking upon the importance of water to biological life. It so surrounds us that we don't often pay attention to it. I do think it is vast, subtle, and worth talking about. I think it requires us to keep thinking the aesthetics of the sublime. Our usual frame of reference for the sublime is to think position in relation to scale. Our smallness in tension with natural landscapes, or more recently technological landscapes, are two examples. This tension thinks what we are by thinking what we are not. Conceptions of the sublime evolve with creative debates. It is compelling how persistent and varied this idea is.

Can we conceive the sublime as a local condition? Perhaps the sublime is best thought as permeation beyond measure. Permeation suggests something that is conditional. Art continually challenges us to think and re-think our conceptions of knowing in relation to not knowing or not yet. Consider the sublime as conditional for a moving ground of thinking. An extended and articulated ritual of thinking made present by creative work. In this exhibition it comes to us through the practices of the artists included. Three categories of examples follow. They frequently overlap and lay out a series of intersections between "blindness" and vision applicable to the work in this exhibition.

Stephanie Sypsa's "Internal Representation: Recalling Girl, Man, and Boy's Face" consists of a set of three panels each composed of two overlaid surfaces with a small gap between. The degraded images of faces on the frontal surfaces speak of loss and absence. They picture something once visible but now only partially so. We must account for the persistent quiet violence of decay, but what I find so compelling here is Sypsa's secondary response to this content. The panel resting behind is visible and we see through to another surface and another cognitive

structure as she uses mapping pins to attempt a further action, a systematic attempt to grasp at the slipping image. Incursions of invisibility occur at all points. The artist's failure to master decay through multiple attempts speaks eloquently.

Margaret Whiting's "Improve and Refine Diplomatic Science" similarly presents us with fissures and gaps between systems, structures, and intentions. Readable book pages presented in vertical segments are interspersed with horizontal segments

where the pages are compressed upon one another in sedimentary layers. We can read some of this text, and see where someone has circled words and phrases. The text refers to reasonable responses to political conflicts. The sedimentary layers are unreadable and unavailable to reason. They have piled up, accumulated beyond reason, becoming something other, a mass of obliterated rationality. The reasonable content of readable text, something akin to a small voice of reason, is undermined and unhinged by the persistence of time where good intentions collapse and lose inertia.

Both of these artists set out to make invisible forces visible by creating a tangible practice of decay and disconnection while leveraging failed attempts at re-connecting, leaving us with





dom of the ancients, when more known and examined, must have reflected a broad stream of light upon the feudal institutions and the public councils of the European nations. We accordingly find that the rules of the civil law were applied * 12 to the government of national rights, and they have * contributed very materially to the erection of the modern international law of Europe. From the 13th to the 16th century, all controversies between nations were adjudged by the rules of the civil law.

Treaties, conventions, and commercial associations of nations had a still more direct and visible influence in the formation of the great modern code of public law. They gave a new character to the law of nations, and rendered it more and more of a positive or instituted code. Commercial enterprises and conventions contributed greatly to improve and refine public law and the intercourse of nations, by protecting the persons and property of merchants in cases of shipwreck, and against piracy, and against seizure and arrest, upon the breaking out of war. Auxiliary treaties were tolerated, by which one nation was allowed to be an enemy to a certain extent only. Thus, if in time of peace, a defensive treaty had been made between one of the parties to a subsequent war and a third power, by which a certain number of troops were to be furnished in case of war, a compliance with this engagement implicated the auxiliary as a party to the war, not so far as her contingent was concerned. The nations of Europe had advanced to this extent in diplomatic science as early as the beginning of the 13th century, and such a refinement was totally unknown to the ancients. (c) Treaties of subsidy showed also the progress of the law of nations. The troops of one nation, to a definite extent, could be hired for the service of one of the belligerents, without affording ground for hostility with the community which supplied the specific aid. The rights of commerce began to be regarded as under the pro-

lacunae that resist being comprehended as image.

Many works in the exhibition are born of improvisation. This attitude sets out to invite disorder as a circumstance for new orders. It is creative thinking provoked by a willingness to let go of plans, to be blind to an overarching structure in favor of an emergent structure. Here resistance to vision germinates difference.

Ken Hall's highly sensual painting "Red Invasion" is dominated by the sudden forceful insistence of a large flower-like

form hovering within a minimal landscape space. The light is fleeting and the large central form is both flower and anti-flower. It is aggressive yet its identity slips towards something other, perhaps a strange, alternate body or organ. It does not dwell easily in this space as different orders of understanding simultaneously structure the visual field. There is a disruption, and dislocation of sense here, both identity and gestalt wholeness become and decay, producing inversions: webs of interpretive trajectories. We see thinking when we see these improvisations co-existing on the plane of the painting. We intensely participate with this image because of its sensual power. The work's dimension traverses a collapse of categorical norms as well as our perceptual uncertainty, all while being an insistently singular object.

Improvisation, chance, and accident invite resistance to vision as a localized method for thinking. These creative habits regulate thinking, slowing down, redirecting, and preparing the ground for intuition. They open upon difference by proliferating pathways for creative possibilities. Richard Wollheim has written well about this experience¹. Wollheim describes the act of painting as “seeing in”, as a slow accumulative process engendering a suggestive state of mind. He contrasts this with less frequent moments of “seeing as”, where some configuration becomes a something, a nameable, measurable, component. To invite resistance to vision as creative practice is to learn to be blind to the nameable. Leonardo da Vinci’s discussion of staring into ‘stains on the wall’ link up with Francis Bacon’s statements on chance and accident, suggesting something of the long history of “seeing in”.



Images that we think of as factual naturalist documents display multiple and interweaving investigations where “blindness” and vision condition perception. Naturalist works of art are haunted by plenitude, by the sheer density of possibilities given to us in our perception of the world.



Art Werger's mezzotint, "Requiem", shows us an extremely complicated pattern of fractured and eroded rock formations above a fast moving stream. The overwhelming complexity of this specific place distances us from any reasonable and expedient efficiency in its image. Mezzotint lends itself to a meditative process. This place, this process, this image, defy normative conception and translation. Werger's interaction with this task becomes as a mediation between forces both geologic and ephemeral: the fact of the worn rocks and the fleeting interplay of light and motion that those

facts inhabit. This image, as a mediation that includes the impossibility of its own purported project, points directly to the resistance of the corporal world to our projects.

Henry Moore reported somewhere that sculpting the reclining figure was in part a response to waking up every morning with just such an animal. Though it is perhaps too flippant an observation, many of us resist vision in the mirror each morning when we see again this body, for which we must find some accommodation. Something of this interaction takes place in Joseph Morzuch's "Self -portrait, Orange Shirt, Eight Days". Eight, eight by eight inch panels redundantly display Morzuch's episodes of peering towards himself. The interplay of constant and

variation is worked out by the overall consistency of his image, by the repeating format, by his orange shirt, all working against a shifting frame, provoked by variable openness at the top and distinct, subtle, slightly claustrophobic, placements of the head towards the bottom of the frame. The overall rhythm of repetition and variation give measure to the specific micro level choices, made mark by mark in his process of recording his accumulating perceptions. These recordings proliferate even as they enforce the neutrality of his project, defying our capacity for judgment as to what might be the better, or more accurate, or more truthful of the various images. These images arise out of highly specific seeing yet remain provisional. We are aware of processes of selection. But unlike a hierarchal selection that is deployed as definitive, or an overall systematic finish that disguises the fragmentation of vision, we have instead variation and un-decidability as a theme.



The works in this exhibition embody a range of creative orientations that map renewed questions about the relationship of practice and theory in art. Work grounded in making the invisible visible, in inviting disorder and improvisation, and, in enacting un-decidable, impossible dialogues with perception, serve as evidence of “resistance cycles”, in artistic practices.

Conceiving a “resistance loop” or cycle where “blindness” is coupled to vision, is way of thinking a kind of ‘feed back loop’ as a paradigm for creativity. A “resistance loop” should be understood to indicate an extended set of possibilities for structuring time. I think it is a conception capable of illuminating both the production and reception of artworks.

I will confess that I hope to find a way of leveraging a discussion of a depth of possibilities for art that is a move beyond the fixation with the surfaces of culture that is the grist of much contemporary art. I realize that the task in doing so is problematic if it substitutes one centering concept for another. And in a sense I am doing this. Though oversimplified, one could say that I am privileging time over language. I hasten to add that there are many ways to conceive time. Varying “images of time” structure different methodologies in science, history, philosophy, religion and the arts. I think that art making is very much caught up with such thinking. Here the idea of a “resistance loop” situates temporality as local to creative activity.

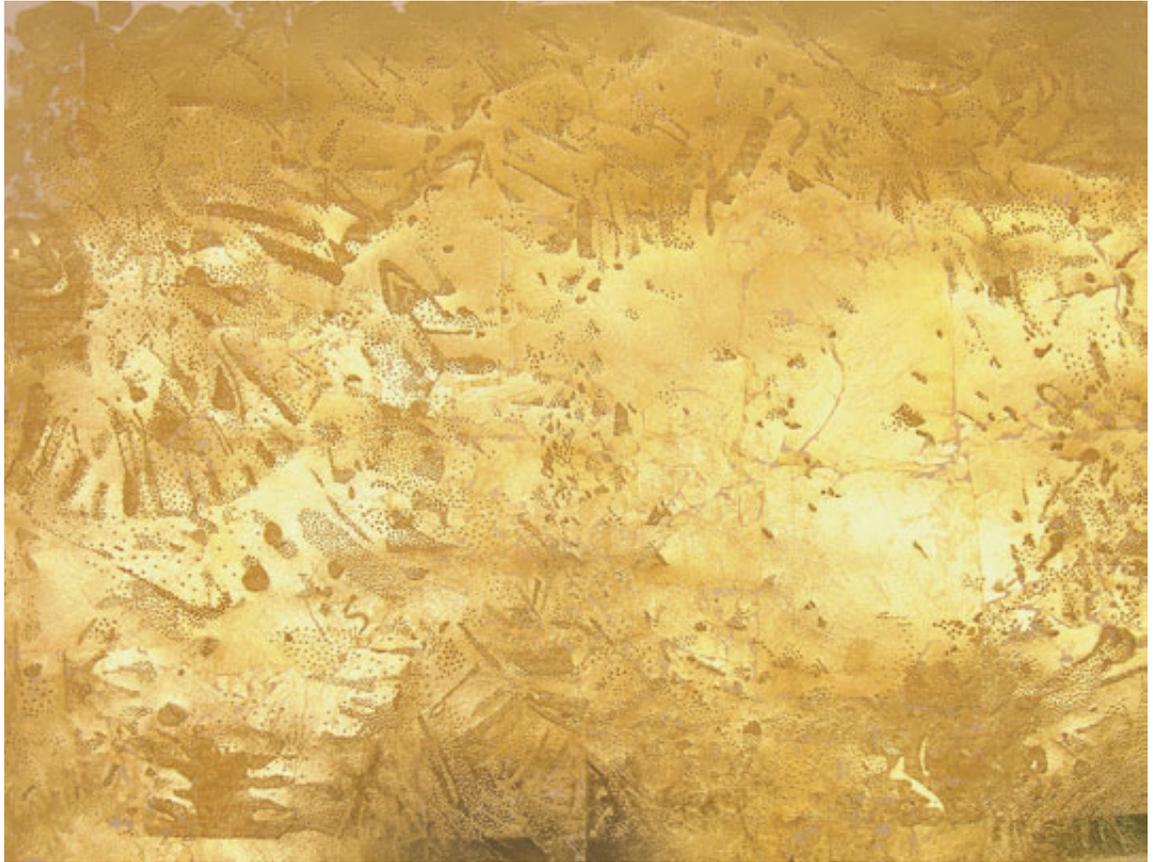
My goal is to complicate and enrich a pattern of highly influential theory rather than dismiss its insights. It is my hope that this thinking is a step towards realizing a moving ground for making/thinking/viewing that proliferates and changes with life. I hope to offer a view of the creative situation as an inclusive, multi-centered web of relations. A situation of diverse relations that yet remains a concrete relation to time.

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¹ Painting as an Art, The A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1984, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.



Erin Enderle (Cincinnati, Ohio)
Purged, digital photo, 11" x 16", 2007



Nicole Foran (Cincinnati, Ohio)
Sun in My Eyes, printmaking, 30" x 22", 2007



J. Brett Grill (Columbia, Missouri)

Downcast Eyes, oil on linen mounted on panel, 33" x 41", 2005



Kenneth Hall (Oxford, Ohio)
Red Invasion, oil, acrylic, shellac on panel, 48" x 48" x 3", 2007



Yumiko Irei-Gokce (Inverness, Illinois)

So Much in Mind, in Mind Eye, mixed media, 53" X 72", 1993 (reworked in 2007)



Irina Koukhanova (Brecksville, Ohio)
Onthogenesis I, charcoal on paper, 19" x 19", 2007



David Chapman Lindsay (Lubbock, Texas)

Blind Faith (White Version), oil on wood, 14" x 14" x 20", 2007



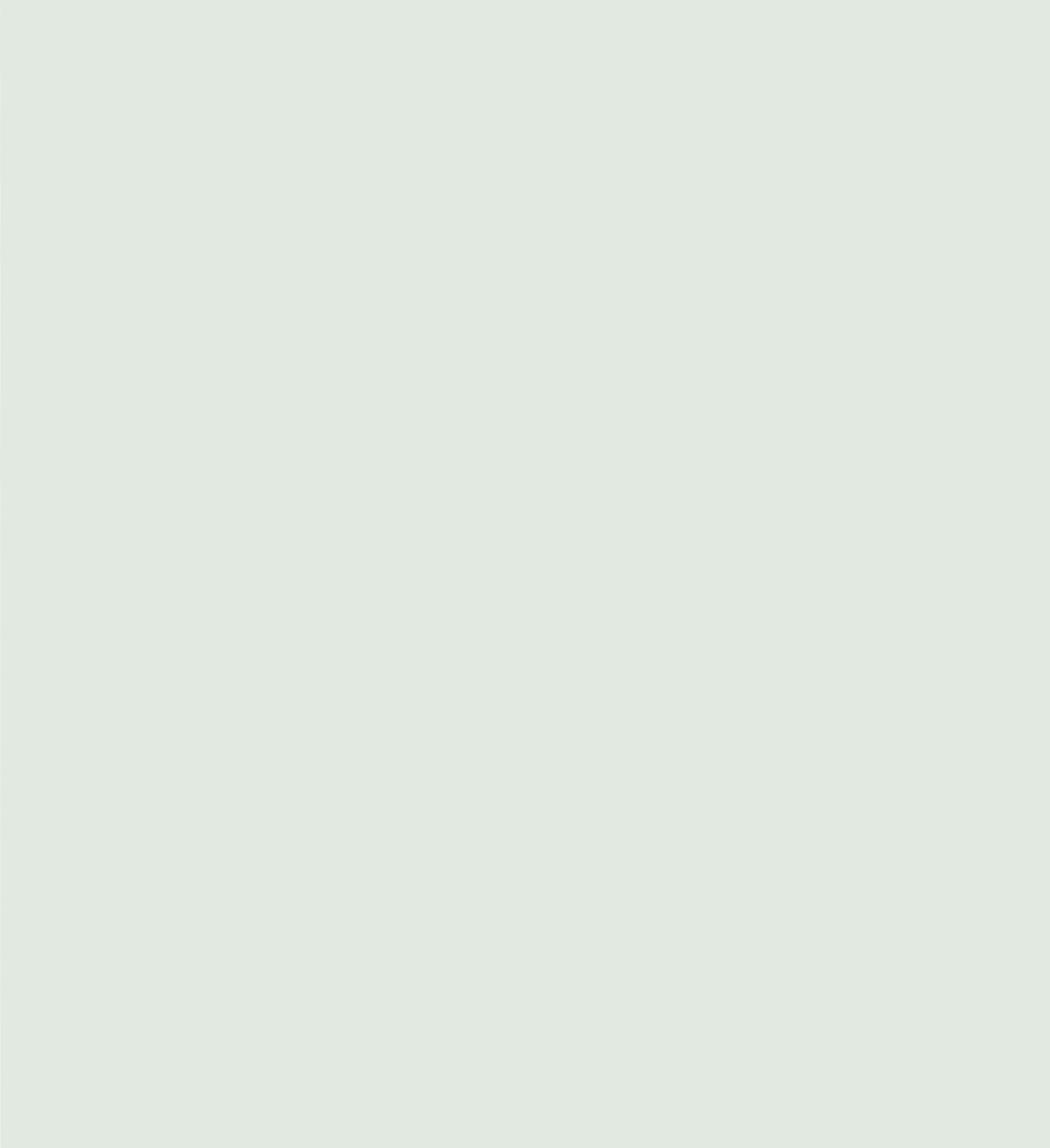


Nickolus Meisel (Pullman, Washington)

Tricycle Magazine; The Buddhist Review Minus Images and Text

papercut (magazine), 12" x 16" x 5", 2007







Armin Mersmann (Midland, Michigan)
Turf Composition III, graphite on paper, 26" x 20", 2005



Joseph Morzuch (Woodway, Texas)

Self-portrait, Orange Shirt, Eight Days, oil on panel, 8" x 8" ea., 2006



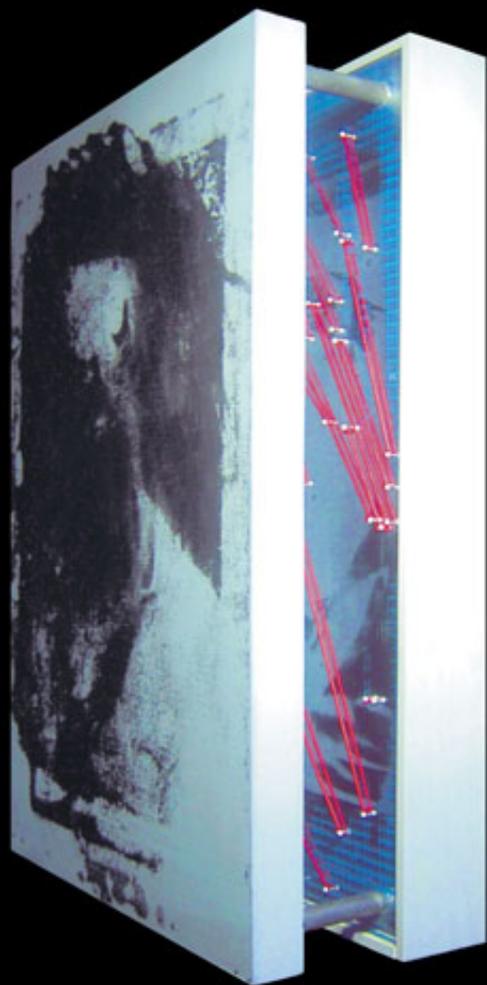


Kurt Nicaise (Covington, Kentucky)

Between Earth and Sky 3, acrylic, lime, mortar colorant on ash-coated paper, 39" x 56", 2006



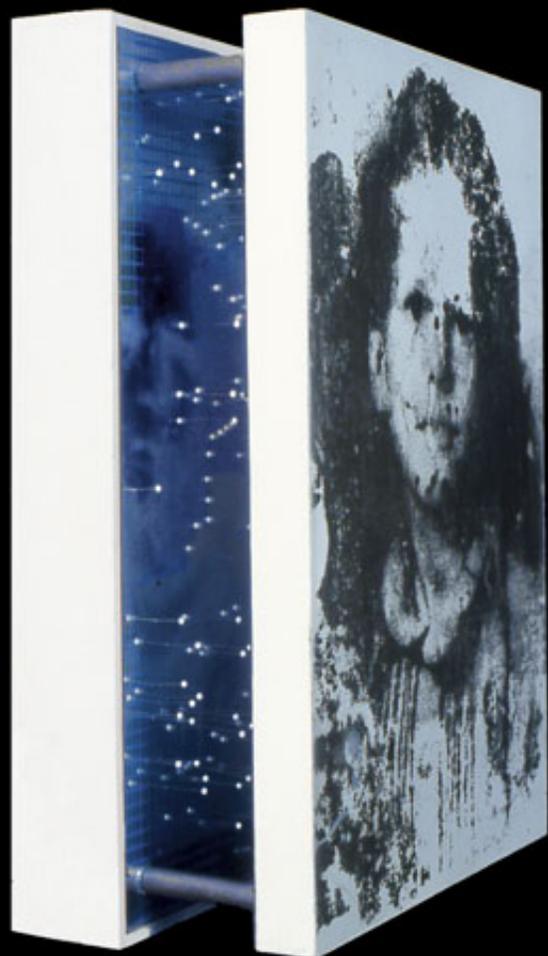
Yvonne Petkus (Bowling Green, Kentucky)
Shift Work, oil on canvas, 46" x 46" x 2", 2006





Stephanie Sypsa (Columbus, Ohio)
Internal Representation: Recalling Girl, Man and Boy's Face
Serigraph, mapping pins, and thread on mirror and panel, 17" x 55" x 7", 2005







Kamila Szczesna (Galveston, Texas)

Transformation II no.5, ink, acrylic transfer, acrylic media on paper, 12" x 9", 2007



Art Werger (Athens, Ohio)
Requiem, mezzotint, 24" x 36", 2007





both of person and property. (This is the fundamental principle of the social compact. An injury, either done or threatened, to the perfect rights of the nation, or of any of its members, and susceptible of no other redress, is a just cause of war. The injury may consist, not only in the direct violation of personal or political rights, but in wrongfully withholding what is due, or in the refusal of a reasonable satisfaction for injuries committed, or of adequate explanation or security in respect to manifest and impending danger. (a) Grotius condemns the doctrine that war may be undertaken to weaken the power of a neighbor, under the apprehension that its farther increase may render him dangerous. This would be contrary to justice, unless we were morally certain, not only of a capacity, but of an actual intention to injure us. We ought rather to meet the anticipated danger by a diligent exhibition and prudent management of our own resources. (b) We ought to cultivate the respect and good will of other nations, and secure their friendship, in case of necessity, by the benevolence and justice of our conduct. War is not to be resorted to without absolute necessity, nor unless peace would be more dangerous and more miserable than war itself. An injury to an individual member of a state is a just cause of war, if redress be refused; but a nation is not bound to go to war on so slight a foundation; for it may do itself great indignity to the injured party, and if this cannot be done, yet the good of the whole is to be preferred to the willow of a part. (c) Every milder method of redress is to be tried, before the nation makes an appeal to arms; and this is the sage and moral precept of the writers on natural law.

* If the question of right between two powers be in any degree dubious, they ought to forbear proceeding to execution, and a nation would be condemned by the impartial voice of mankind, if it voluntarily went to war upon a claim of which it doubted the legality. But, on political subjects, we cannot expect, and are not to look for the same rigorous demonstration as in the physical sciences. Policy is a science of

(a) Grotius, l. 2, c. 1 and 2; Rutherford, l. 2, c. 8, § 1, c. 1, s. 1, c. 1, s. 1.

(b) Grotius, l. 2, c. 10-12; Rutherford, l. 2, c. 8.

the English courts to the case of a neutral country, and they are admitted to trade, to the privileges of the case of *The Danona*, (3) the rule of *House of Lords*, in 1802, in a natural-born subject, resident in Portugal, the Portuguese character, so in Holland, then at war with England, illegal trade. The same rule with a natural-born British subject doing it was held, that he might leave with England, but at peace with the same principle that, for a subject of the enemy without it becomes the test of national character explicitly admitted in the courts resides in a belligerent country, has an enemy's property, and if he enjoys all the privileges, and is engaged in the neutral trade. He takes advantage, whatever they may be, (4) The doctrine is founded on national law, and accords with all civilized nations. Agreements mandate domestic priority. (5) It is admitted to acquire a neutral character in opposition to the belligerent, if he emigrate from that country, (6) It shows explicitly the right

(1) *McCulloch v. Brown*, 4 Bro. & P. 12.

(2) *Case of a Ship*, 105, 106.

(3) *Case of the Danona*, 105, 106.

(4) *Case of the King Charles*, 105, 106.

(5) *Case of the Danona*, 105, 106.

(6) *Case of the Danona*, 105, 106.

(7) *The Danona*, 105, 106.

(8) *Case of the Danona*, 105, 106.

(9) *Case of the Danona*, 105, 106.

(10) *Case of the Danona*, 105, 106.

(11) *Case of the Danona*, 105, 106.

(12) *Case of the Danona*, 105, 106.

(13) *Case of the Danona*, 105, 106.

(14) *Case of the Danona*, 105, 106.

(15) *Case of the Danona*, 105, 106.

(16) *Case of the Danona*, 105, 106.

(17) *Case of the Danona*, 105, 106.

(18) *Case of the Danona*, 105, 106.

(19) *Case of the Danona*, 105, 106.

(20) *Case of the Danona*, 105, 106.

Margaret Whiting (Waterloo, Iowa)

Improve and Refine Diplomatic Science, altered law books, 10" x 34" x 2", 2005

of Englishmen residing in a neutral country, in respect to their local neutral character. (4) In the case laid down by the English restricted terms, a British subject, was allowed the benefit of neutrality as to render his trade with the enemy, not impeachable as an act of war, as afterwards applied (5) to a British subject in the United States, and finally trade to a country at war with the United States.

In all commercial purposes, the distinction is the place of birth, which has been repeatedly and consistently held by the United States. If he is a British subject, he is in property is liable to capture as an enemy in a neutral country, he is subject to all the inconveniences, the disadvantages and disabilities, of the country of his birth. *76

It is founded on the principle of reciprocity, and the reason and practice of the law of nations is to be assimilated as Privileges of citizenship is not, however, possible, that will protect such a neutral claim of the native country *flagrante bello*. (7) Validity of migration in a war in

18. The *Emment*, 1 Rob. Rep. 205.

19. *cf.* Murray v. Schooner *Chesapeake*, 19 U.S. 489. *Livingston v. Woodford*, 10 U.S. 201. *The Francon*, 8 Cranch, 365.

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(8) Under Henry III. in 1260, the Flemings obtained leave to carry on their trade in wool, when England and France were at war, so long as they took no other part in the war than their wool, under his feudal relation to the crown of France, was seized upon by means of his homage to purchase. *Roeder's Early Royal History of England*, vol. 1, 180.

a neighbor, under the apprehension that its further increase may render him dangerous. This would be contrary to justice, unless we were morally certain, not only of a capacity, but of an actual intention to injure us. We ought rather to meet the anticipated danger by a diligent cultivation and prudent management of our own resources. We ought to conciliate the respect and good will of other nations, and secure their assistance, in case of need, by the benevolence and justice of our conduct. War is not to be resorted to without absolute necessity, nor unless peace would be more dangerous and more miserable than war itself. An injury to an individual member of a state is a just cause of war, if redress be refused; but a nation is not bound to go to war on so slight a foundation; for it may of itself grant indemnity to the injured party, and if this cannot be done, yet the good of the whole is to be preferred to









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